

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: August 14, 2014 **Meeting No.:** 190

Project: 1525 N. Calvert Street **Phase:** Schematic

Location: 1525 N. Calvert Street

PRESENTATION:

Mr. Paul Thompson, representing Architectural Design Works introduced the project to the Panel. As conceived, the project includes three levels of parking and four floors of office for the State of Maryland Department of Human Resources. Exterior materials proposed include a combination of polished masonry units, storefront glass, a metallic pigmented external insulation system with a dryvit finish and ornamental metal work.

Access to the lower three floors of parking will be from the existing garage entry off of 1510 Guilford Avenue. The major pedestrian public entrance will be from Calvert Street along the narrow west façade of the building off of a five foot wide public sidewalk.

In the written project summary provided to the Panel, the Developer/Architect Team stressed the importance of achieving Lead Silver Equivalency, being in harmony with the community and serving as an appropriate “gateway” building to the Greenmount West Community.

COMMENTS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel expressed concern about the design direction advanced. Given that the stated objective of the project is to create harmony with the community, the design lacked the necessary contextual references and nuances to achieve this goal. Located in a neighborhood rich in the architectural heritage of masonry loft and warehouse buildings and orderly rows of two and three story repetitive townhomes, the design presented was aggressively different and visually busy. Each façade presented was different with no or very little continuity from one façade to the next. Moreover, elevations did not always match floor plans. This was particularly the case with the south elevation where a projected stair tower was not shown in plan.

To further advance the design, the Panel urged the architect to study the local loft/warehouse vernacular.

Specifically:

- The dominance of masonry loft buildings with an orderly cadence of punched window openings and/or strong vertical masonry piers,
- The clarity of a vertical tri-part organization of base, middle and top.
- The continuity of facades as they turn corners and effortlessly transition from one façade to the next; creating a unity of whole. Such a study of context, it is hoped; would lead to a calmer, more holistic composition.

The Panel expressed particular concern for the following

- West Entry Façade: as a narrow façade of no more than 45’ to 50’ in length, the four distinct vertical expressions appeared disjointed. The west/south corner element was over scaled, too heroic and visually aggressive.
- South Façade: as the most visible façade for both pedestrians and motorists traveling north on Calvert Street, this façade exhibited a parking garage banality. The dominant south west corner element, the horizontal windows associated with suburban office buildings and the apparent projected stair tower on the east end of the façade represented three gestures in search of a unifying element.

The Panel questioned the choice of materials. The highly polished and reflective masonry and the dryvit system proposed have no precedent in the neighborhood. The architect’s stated intent to “differentiate” the building from the local context in terms of choice of material, texture and color was not received favorably.

Given the narrow five foot width of the sidewalk on the east side of Calvert Street, the Panel felt the building should set back from the western property line several feet to create a safety zone for the public entering and leaving the building.

In order to facilitate the approval process, recognizing the Developer’s time frame; the Panel strongly recommended a design workshop session with the architect and members of the Planning Department and Panel prior to the next UDARP presentation.

PANEL ACTION:

Recommend continued development.

Attending:

Rick Richardson – Richardson Engineering

Paul Thompson – ADW, Inc

Rick Gabell – GRG Enterprises

Messrs. Haresign and Burns - UDARP Panel

Director Tom Stosur, Christina Gaymon –Planning Department